Chimerie Chipmunk and Mr. Chesterton's Fence
By Yu May

Once upon a time, in the quaint woodland of Riverbend where the talking animals made their home, there lived a little girl named Chimerie Chipmunk. She wasn't a bad little chipmunk, though she did quite enjoy watching other children get spankings, especially when they weren't chipmunks.

This was because each woodland creature had a different way of spanking their children, and all of them fascinated Chimerie. When it comes to bestowing gifts, nature is endless in her creativity.

Chimerie's best friend, Hana Hedgehog, would get spankings on her bottom like any other child of the forest, though thanks to Hana's spikes, when her parents said, "This spanking hurts me more than it hurts you," they really meant it. However, after the spanking, Hana would always be put in timeout, and hedgehog timeouts are far worse than hedgehog spankings. Hana's parents would take turns rolling up into a ball, and then Hana would have to sit on her mama or papa's spiny back for a timeout. By the time it was over, poor Hana's bottom had been poked and pinched all over.

After hearing Hana's story, Chimerie had started exploring the forest, collecting other forest children's spanking stories as greedily as any chipmunk ever collected acorns. She discovered that the Vole family and the Shrew family had started using their tails for spanking, after learning the trick of it from their mice neighbors, who lived in the church just behind the forest. The "tail spanking" technique had become popular for all the tailed-creatures, though the Beaver family used their wide tails like paddles, while the Otter family used their long tails like slings. In contrast, the Red-Tail-Squirrel and Fox-Squirrel families would order their children to climb up a tall tree and lie down across a branch to wait for them. Then the mama squirrel or papa squirrel would scale up the tre to spank their naughty squirrel children with a thin switch, which was the traditional squirrel manner.

One fine autumn morning, Chimerie emerged from her burrow at the base of a stout, knotted oak tree, where she lived with her mother, Mirtha, who Chimerie called "Marma," and her father, Chiswick, who she called "Paw-paw." Chimerie enjoyed watching the first light of dawn paint the canopy pink and gold. Today was the day of the Great Gathering, when all the talking animals of Riverbend would meet to renew their peace. Outside of the woods of Riverbend, the law of nature was binding, and if any prey animal was caught there by a predator, their life was forfeit. But for as long as anyone could remember, a "No Hunting" sign had been hung on the oldest tree in Riverbend, placed there by one of the men from the church when it was first built. And because the talking animals wished to be good guests, they all agreed to respect the law, no matter how strange they found the custom.

This is why Chimerie was not frightened when she spotted Mr. Quick, the brown Fox, carefully crawling under the wire fence that separated Riverbend from the neighboring farmland.

Chimerie scampered up to surprise the fox, resting on her haunches and flattening her skirt. “Greetings, Mr. Quick! Did you get a chance to jump over the lazy dog today?”

Mr. Quick squealed like a little girl, though his voice was not particularly high-pitched, as foxes go. “Zounds! You put my heart in my chest, Chimerie!”

His hair standing on end, Mr. Quick struggled to extricate himself from underneath the fence, then fetched his flat-brimmed hat and slapped it on his head. “Never interrupt a fellow when he’s trying to cross under Mr. Chesterton’s fence, child. You’re liable to get a fox killed!”

Chimeries eyes went wide. “Mr. Chesterton? Who is he?”

“He’s a man of course! My sweet grandmother, may she rest in peace, watched Mr. Chesterton put up this fence with her own two, clever eyes!” Mr. Quick gesticulated at a freshly painted wooden sign that proclaimed: “Private Land. No Trespassing.”

Chimmerie surveyed the fence, unimpressed. From the stories, she had always imagined a solid, stoney thing, like the old church. “So this is the man’s fence? Doesn’t seem so dangerous to me. Looks like Marma and Paw-paw were worried over nothing!”

Mr. Quick shook his head as he carefully held down his own tail and stepped back from the fence. “Looks can be deceiving. Your Marma and Paw-paw are absolutely–waitaminnit! That means you’ve been warned against coming close to this fence before? Chimerie, shame on you! You shouldn’t be within a hundred prints of this thing!”

Chimerie swallowed as she remembered her Marma’s last warning about the fence, when she’d pointed it out from the high hill. *“If I ever catch you within a hundred pawprints of that fence, you’ll be catching a hundred pawprints across your little bottom!”*

Not wanting to admit this out loud, Chimerie shuffled her feet to look innocent, then lost patience and kicked the fallen red leaves. “But, I didn’t mean to…Hold on! Mr. Quick, you great, fat hypocrite! If it’s so dangerous, then what are you doing here?”

Licking his chops, Mr. Quick patted his stomach. “I was hunting, of course. Found a fat pheasant. Asked the bounder if he wanted to surrender, but–Burp! …Answer came there none.”

Having never dared wander far from the central market in Riverbend, Chimerie swallowed as she remembered her mother’s stories about naughty chipmunk children being snatched up and eaten outside the fence.

Before Chimerie could argue further, Mr. Quick easily picked her up the scruff of her neck, spun her around, and set her down. Then he patted her backside to shoo her away. “Now, get your tail home, and never let me catch you out here again, or I’ll spank you myself, then take you straight to your parents so you can ask them for another smacking.”

Chimerie scampered away, eager to give the appearance of obeying. But as soon as she was at a safe distance, she peered at the fence from behind a tree. The metal posts were strange to her, shiny as glistening pebbles by the river bed, yet straighter than any tree or branch. Thin wires caught the light, like whiskers, but as far as the eye could see, dividing the world starkly in two. Of course, she would never dream of crossing to the other side, but…how marvelous it would be…to climb it?

…

Chimerie played with her food, a bowl of her mother's vegetable soup, served in an acorn cap bowl. Chiswick Chipmunk was finishing the last of his bowl, while Mirtha had begun cleaning up the first batch of dishes at the sink.

Remembering her adventure meeting Mr. Quick, Chimerie didn't want to admit how she had technically disobeyed her mother's orders, and formed her question carefully. "Marma…I met Mr. Quick today. He said he was coming from the other side of the man's fence."

Mirtha Chipmunk, who dearly loved doing the dishes, as singing under her breath. But at the mention of the fence, she stiffened, then scooped up a wooden spoon from the counter, as if on instinct, rolling up her sleeve. "T-The fence? Young lady, you know full well that I'll–"

Sensing trouble was imminent, Chiswick Chipmunk hurriedly set down his spoon and stood to prevent his wife from spanking first and asking questions later. "That's interesting, Chimerie. There, there, Mirtha. You finish up those dishes, and I'll talk to Chimerie. You've had enough stress for one day."

Spinning his stout wife around, Chiswick patted her playfully across the rump to send her back to the kitchen. With a cute little yelp, Mirtha bustled back to her dishes, giving her slender husband a look that was a mix of fury and adoration. "You spoil me, Chiswick. Call me if you require backup from the *long arm of the law*." As Mirtha spoke the final words, she flicked the wooden spoon with ominous precision, and glanced at her daughter with eyes that seemed to shoot daggers.

Chimerie's tail quivered as she realized she had just narrowly escaped a spanking. To hide her nerves, she held her with one hand behind her back as her Paw-paw led her to the living room sofa. Papa sat her down beside him, and looked down at her with stern eyes. "Chimerie, you said you met Mr. Quick coming from the other side of Mr. Chesterton's fence. How close to the fence were you, when you met him?"

Knowing she had definitely gotten within a hundred steps of the fence, Chimerie fidgeted. "I'm not sure, I couldn't count the steps. I didn't try to touch it. Mr. Quick said I should leave it alone."

“And Mr. Quick is exactly right. Now, if I asked Mr. Quick *how close* you got to the fence, what do you suppose he’d tell me?”

Chimerie swallowed. In the past, her Paw-paw had told her that she should always tell him the truth, even if she thought she might get spanked for doing something wrong, because living with a lie was worse than any spanking. “...I think I was within a 100 steps of it, Paw-paw.”

Mirtha’s voice boomed from the kitchen. “I knew it! Why I oughta paddle her tail ‘til it shines like a cherry! It was just this morning, that I told her–”

Mirtha appeared at the door to the living room, armed with the wooden spoon, before Chiswick cleared his throat. “Marma, finish your dishes.”

Mirtha stamped her feet, fuming, as she slapped the wooden spoon sharply against her own palm several times in quick succession. “...And if I don’t?”

Chiswick beamed up at his formidable wife, who easily towered over him. “I’d hate to have to spank both my girls in one day.”

Mirtha gripped the wooden spoon so tightly, Chimerie thought it would snap in two. Then Mirtha’s foul mood seemed to vanish, her voice as sweet as red clover. “As you wish!”

At the mention of spanking, Chimerie was now mentally preparing to resign herself to her fate, but her father’s voice was reassuring. “Thank you for telling me the truth, Chimerie. But you know your mother has warned you not to come close to that fence, or you’d get a spanking. Have you anything to say in your defense? Did you have any good reason to be so close to the fence in the first place?”

Chimerie tried to recollect the events of her day. “I suppose…when I saw Mr. Quick I ran up to greet him, but I didn’t notice the fence until after I said hello. I didn’t realize I was so close to it until he pointed it out. I couldn’t even see some of it, until the light caught it.”

Chiswick considered his daughter’s explanation. “In other words, you didn’t intentionally disobey your Marma’s orders?”

Mirtha’s voice barked from the kitchen. “Objection! The defense is leading the witness!”

Chiswick smiled. “Overruled.”

Mirtha appeared at the door, looking dour. “Objection! The defense is now playing both judge, and jury?”

“Yes. Would you like me to hold you in contempt of court?”

Without breaking eye contact, Mirtha slapped her own rump with the wooden spoon, three times on one side, then another three taps on the other side. Then she stood tall, before bowing and retreating into the kitchen. “...No, your honor.”

With a sigh of relief, Chiswick returned his attention to his daughter. “Where were we, Chimerie? Ah yes, you said it was only after you spoke to Mr. Quick that you saw how close you were to the fence?”

Chimerie nodded, and Chiswick continued his interrogation. “And what did Mr. Quick tell you about Mr. Chesterton’s fence?”

“That it was put up by Man, and that he has to cross it to hunt outside of Riverbend, and that a girl ought never to interrupt a fellow as he’s trying to crawl underneath it, and that I should get my tail home, or he’d spank me and send me home to ask you for another spanking!”

“As he should have! And did you come home right away?”

Chimerie remembered how she’d paused to take one final, longing look at the fence. “Yes, Paw-paw…though I did think about touching it.”

Mirtha’s voice echoed from the kitchen. “Guilty! The defendant enters a plea of guilty!”

Chiswick called over his shoulder to the kitchen. “Thank you. And does the prosecution rest her case?”

The wooden spoon appeared from behind the door frame that led to the kitchen, as if it was peeking around the corner. “Prosecution rests. I can be the executioner if you want!”

“Duly noted. I have reached a verdict.”

Mirtha poked her head out of the kitchen, grinning slyly. “Oh, so now you’re the jury?”

“Yes, your honor. On the charge of willfully trespassing, we find the defendant…not guilty!”

Mirtha brandished her wooden spoon like a sword. “Boo! We’ll appeal immediately!”

“No, prosecution has no recourse for appeal. The double jeopardy clause protects Chimerie from being tried twice for the same offense. Now, finish those dishes, dear. You’re scaring our daughter.”

Mirtha blew her husband a kiss, then bustled away. “Yes, dear!”

Shaking his head, Chiswick propped Chimerie on his knee. “Chimerie, I’m not going to spank you this time. But you must remember to give that fence a wide berth, from now on…Remember

that it was made by Man, and Man is not always kind to creatures like us. But kind or cruel, we must always respect the law of Man."

Chimerie pouted. “But about Mr. Quick? Or the mice who live in the Church?”

“All animals have their own domains, but ours is not beyond that fence. Do you need a spanking to remember that?”

Chimerie remembered the magic of the fence. Truth be told, she knew she’d happily take a spanking for the chance to learn more about it, but at the thought of her last spanking, she instead chose to say what she knew her father wanted to hear. “No, sir. I will remember.”

…

[End of Chapter 1]
To Be Continued!

[Author’s note: an AI chatlog was used to create the rough draft of this story, before I quit using AI as part of my writing process. The text of the final draft is my own work.]